Wilderness Perspectives

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1. WILDERNESS CHARACTER

By Rick Potts, National Park Service Representative, Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center

. . . each agency administering any area designated as wilderness shall be responsible for ***preserving the wilderness character*** *of the area and shall so administer such area for such other purposes for which it may have been established as also to* ***preserve its wilderness character.*** [emphasis added]

—Section 4 (b), The Wilderness Act of 1964

The requirement to preserve wilderness character, referenced throughout the Wilderness Act and agency policies, is a primary criterion for judging the appropriateness of potential agency actions, public uses, and technologies in wilderness. The rules of statutory construction maintain that Congress never uses unnecessary language, so we must assume they intended to attach an extraordinary importance to this responsibility through the redundant direction found in the sentence above.

Since the National Park Service has an affirmative responsibility for preserving wilderness character in its designated wilderness areas, we need some sense of how the tangible characteristics (biological and physical components) of a landscape, and the intangible meanings (values) humans find in it, converge to shape wilderness character. Agency managers, visitors, and the American public should become more aware of how their actions may enhance or diminish this elusive but definitive quality of wilderness.

Wilderness character is not explicitly defined in the Wilderness Act of 1964, and there is limited legislative record to offer clarification or guidance from the authors of the Wilderness Act. In 1983, the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs reaffirmed the direction contained in the Wilderness Act by stating: "The overriding principle guiding management of all wilderness areas, regardless of which agency administers them, is the Wilderness Act mandate to preserve their wilderness character." So, what *is* wilderness character? Doug Scott, in a paper reviewing the legislative basis and history of the development of the Wilderness Act, concludes that managers need to look to the first sentence of subsection 2(c) of the Wilderness Act to establish the meaning of wilderness character:

> A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.

Scott maintains that the essential key to understanding this mandated goal lies with the word "untrammeled," perhaps the single most misinterpreted word in modern legislation. Not a synonym for *untrampled*, untrammeled means unrestrained, unimpeded, unconfined, free of human interference and manipulation. Free to be wild. Howard Zahniser, principle drafter of the Wilderness Act, was staunch in his defense of the use of "untrammeled" in the face of opposition from colleagues who argued (correctly) that the word is seldom used and would be misunderstood. One suggested the word "undisturbed" be substituted instead. Zahniser replied:

> The problem with the word "Disturbed" (that is, "Undisturbed") is that most of these areas can be considered as disturbed by the human usages *for which many of them are being preserved*; that is, temporarily disturbed. The idea within the word "Untrammeled" of their not being subjected to human controls and manipulations that hamper the free play of natural forces *is the distinctive one* that seems to make this word the most suitable one for its purpose within the Wilderness Bill.

Efforts to establish wilderness character monitoring protocols are currently underway by an interagency team chaired by Peter Landres from the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute. They have suggested that, in the absence of a legal definition, the statutory qualities of wilderness character must be derived directly from the wording of the Wilderness Act. They further suggest that the Policy and Definition sections in the Wilderness Act (sections 2(a) and 2(c), respectively) offer four intertwined and mutually reinforcing qualities of wilderness character (all quotes that follow are from these sections in the Wilderness Act):

- **"Untrammeled"** – Wilderness is "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man," and "generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature." Wilderness should be allowed to be wild, unconstrained or manipulated by humans—what some have termed *self-willed*.

- **"Undeveloped" and "does not occupy and modify"** – Wilderness is "without permanent improvements or human habitation," "with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable," and "where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Avoiding expanding settlement and mechanization, wilderness shows minimal evidence of modern human occupation or modification.

- **"Natural"** – Wilderness is "protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions," and is "land retaining its primeval character and influence." Wilderness ecological systems are substantially free from the effects of modern civilization, including air and water pollution, alien species invasions, nutrient and energy cycles.

- **"Outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation"** – This quality cannot be neatly summarized with a single word or phrase from the Wilderness Act, hence use of the entire phrase to denote this quality. The other statement from the Wilderness Act that supports this quality is that wildernesses "shall be administered . . . in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness." "Wilderness areas shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreation, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use," and provides opportunities for wilderness experiences, allowing people to experience discovery, remoteness, solitude, freedom, risk, and physical and mental challenges.

These first two qualities are in a negative form defining what wilderness is not, while the last two qualities are in a positive form defining what wilderness is. All four qualities of wilderness, both negative and positive, in aggregate form the basis for understanding wilderness character.

And how do we preserve and protect wilderness character? Roger Kaye, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Ranger-Pilot at the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, suggests that, as visitors and as stewards, we open ourselves to the implicit message of wilderness character through yielding our uses and conveniences to these most enduring qualities of wilderness. Like the character of any symbolic place, the character of wilderness is enhanced by how we approach it, through every act of respect, reverence, and especially—restraint. Like personal character, wilderness character emerges from the large and small decisions we make that test our commitment to our ideals. It gains strength through sacrifice for principle. As the circumstances we impose upon ourselves protect the wilderness condition, they lift our connection to the landscape from the utilitarian and commodity orientation that dominates the major part of our relationship with nature.

As agency stewards, charged with temporary caretaker responsibilities of this permanent resource of wilderness, it is our responsibility to ensure that the people who created and who own this wonderful treasure continue to have the opportunity to enjoy it in an unconfined manner. Many wilderness related values are deeply personal, and not easily articulated, and any attempt to regulate or dictate what these experiences and values should be will instantly diminish them. That is the paradoxical nature of wilderness character, and our responsibility to preserve it.

That is why Congress could not, or chose not to, define exactly what character meant. Because it means something slightly (or radically) different to all of us. Aldo Leopold identified this quality, our "vigorous individualism," as the defining essence of the American culture. Teddy Roosevelt, always aware of his "Manly Man" image, nevertheless had the courage to articulate intangible wilderness values when he wrote:

> There are no words that can tell of the hidden spirit of the wilderness—that can reveal its mystery, its melancholy, and its charm.

This topic received thorough treatment by Roderick Nash in his defining text *Wilderness and the American Mind*. Nash describes Pultizer prize-winning poet Gary Snyder and Theodore Rozak calling for the emergence of "a new ecologically sensitive harmony-oriented wild-minded scientific-spiritual culture" that would lead Americans away from an over-dependence on science, technology, and reason, and a renewal of the importance of magic, intuition, mystery, and awe. Howard Zahniser felt that wilderness served as an aid for people in "forsaking human arrogance and courting humility in respect for the community and with regard for the environment. Zahniser expanded on this in the legislative history (The Need for Wilderness Areas, 1956):

> We deeply need the humility to know ourselves as dependent members of a great community of life, and this can indeed be one of the spiritual benefits of a wilderness experience. Without the gadgets, the inventions, the contrivances, whereby men have seemed to establish among themselves an independence of nature, without these distractions, to know the wilderness is to know a profound humility, to recognize one's littleness, to sense dependence and interdependence, indebtedness, and responsibility.

Wallace Stegner shared Leopold's views of the importance of wilderness in helping us understand, from a historical context, who we are as a nation when he said "an American, insofar as he is new and different at all, is a civilized man who has renewed himself in the wild."

Kaye notes that Zahniser continued this line of thought, emphasizing "this is the distinctive ministration of wilderness to modern man, the characteristic *effect* of an area which we most deeply need to provide for in our preservation programs." Therefore, the essence of wilderness character is an intangible *effect* that the wilderness area has on a person, whether physically present in the wilderness landscape, or vicariously by just knowing those lands exist and are permanently protected.

To be sure, an "untrammeled," "natural," and "undeveloped" landscape is required to create the defining context of wilderness, but the true measure of wilderness character is experiential. Wilderness character exists in the mind of the beholder, safe from the reach of databases and statistical analysis software.

Kaye concludes "Wilderness stands as a symbol of our respect for what remains of the natural world, and that part of ourselves that relates to it. Wilderness symbolizes our inheritance. Wilderness symbolizes our obligation to the future inhabitants of our ever-more distracted globe. Its character evokes a sense of proportion in the larger scheme of things. It opens us to what Zahniser described as "a true understanding of ourselves, our culture, our own natures, and our place in all nature."

2. THE IDEA OF WILDERNESS

By *Wilderness Watch* with reviews and edits by the Arizona Wilderness Coalition, Californians for Western Wilderness, Friends of the Bitterroot, National Parks Conservation Association, River Runners for Wilderness, the Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, and Wild Wilderness

This essay comes from the wilderness advocacy community. It reflects what we believe is most critically importatn for the public to know about the unique resource of wilderness. Today, the visionary concept of "wilderness" is under unprecedented assault as the National Wilderness Preservation System becomes incresingly motorized, developed, and crowded. This essay reviews fundamental principles that can keep wilderness "real."

> *. . . Wilderness is a place of restraint, for managers as well as visitors.*
>
> —Pinchot Institute for Conservation, *Ensuring the Stewardship of the National Wilderness Preservation System*, 2001

Wilderness is Relationship

All cultures across history have set some places apart from the routines and common behaviors of daily life. The purpose of these special places is to re-orient our focus and perceptions, in a setting that is conducive to reflection. We approach such places differently than we do other places in our daily lives. It is the way we interact with places set apart that makes them special, and enables us to experience the unique values these places provide in nurturing the human spirit. Examples include shrines, memorials, and ceremonial sites. Wilderness also is such a place.

Like all special places set apart, wilderness is not just a geographic location, it is an *idea* and an ideal. The "idea" of wilderness encompasses certain values that we as a society have chosen to protect. Therefore, Congress enacted the Wilderness Act in 1964, with the singular statutory purpose of securing the *benefits* of an enduring resource of wilderness:

> " . . . it is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness. **For this purpose** there is hereby established a National Wilderness Preservation System…"
>
> *—The Wilderness Act, Sec. 2(a)*

The Wilderness Act intended that wilderness would have meaning, that it would be protected *for* something, not simply be a place where certain activities such as logging do not occur. Although wilderness may visually look similar to other undeveloped landscapes such as national park backcountry or national forest roadless areas, it is the way that humans interact with wilderness that makes it different from other landscapes. To assure that the unique benefits of wilderness will continue to exist for generations to come, the Wilderness Act contains principles and statutory direction intended to shape and guide our relationship with these special places.

In preserving wilderness we are essentially preserving an endangered experience, and an endangered idea — the idea that self-willed landscape has value and should exist. Wilderness offers the opportunity to experience a form of relationship between humans and nature that is increasingly rare in our modern world, a relationship in which humans do not dominate, manipulate, or control nature but instead immerse ourselves as a member in the larger community of life.

What makes this possible is the authenticity of wilderness. This authenticity offers us a window into a world other than the world humans have constructed and now dominate. It is the authenticity of wilderness that gives it deep meaning, and imbues it with immense intrinsic value as part of the ancient fabric of the earth.

In wilderness, humans leave the mechanized, technological contrivances of modern civilization behind and experience wind, rain, bear, terrain, stream crossings, and ourselves on nature's terms. Experiencing our connection to a world larger than ourselves is the timeless symbolic value provided by all special places set apart.

What keeps wilderness "real" and alive in our world today is the attitude with which we approach and interact with these congressionally designated landscapes. In this way, "wilderness" is not just physical geography, it is also a concept that must be protected and preserved if *wilderness* (not just undeveloped landscape) is to continue to exist for future generations to experience and enjoy.

Defining Wilderness

With passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, Congress gave the concept of "wilderness" a legal definition:

> A wilderness, *in contrast* with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and community of life are *untrammeled* by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. (emphasis added)
>
> *—The Wilderness Act, Section 2(c)*

A defining aspect of wilderness is that it will forever remain *in contrast* to modern civilization, its technologies, conventions, and contrivances. The Wilderness Act expressly prohibits motorized equipment, mechanical transport, commercial enterprise, and the placement of structures and installations precisely because allowing the routine intrusion of such things blurs the distinction between wilderness and modern civilization, and psychologically alters our relationship with these places. The more these intrusions are allowed to occur in wilderness, the less meaning wilderness will have, and the less we as a society will retain the special psychological, symbolic, and experiential values that *wilderness* provides.

Opportunities for solitude from modern civilization forms an intrinsic component of an area's wilderness character. Good wilderness stewardship requires protecting this important quality, and not allowing it to diminish over time.

A second defining aspect of wilderness is that it will remain untrammeled. Untrammeled does not mean "untrampled" or "undeveloped." Untrammeled means unfettered, free of intentional interference or manipulation. By selecting "untrammeled" as a core defining quality of wilderness, Congress defined the kind of *relationship* that humans are to have with wilderness. By law, we are to allow wilderness to be self-willed, shaped by natural processes, not controlled and manipulated by our own human goals and desires. Being *in contrast* to civilization and *untrammeled* by human control and manipulation are key to the very meaning of wilderness, and are what differentiates wilderness from other undeveloped landscapes.

Wilderness Character

The overarching mandate of the Wilderness Act is to preserve the wilderness *character* of each area in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Wilderness character, like personal character, is comprised of more than just physical features, it encompasses both tangible and intangible qualities. Preserving wilderness character is the key to keeping alive the meaning of wilderness in America.

Some tangible components of wilderness character include the presence of native wildlife at naturally occurring population levels; lack of human structures, roads, motor vehicles or mechanized equipment; lack of crowding or large groups; few or no human "improvements" for visitor convenience such as highly engineered and over-developed trails, developed campsites, signs, or bridges; and little or no sign of biophysical damage caused by visitor use, such as trampled or denuded ground, or habituated or displaced wildlife.

Some intangible components of wilderness character include outstanding opportunities for reflection; freedom; risk; adventure, discovery, and mystery; places where self-reliance and safety are a personal responsibility; untrammeled, wild and self-willed land; uncommodified, not for sale; opportunities to experience our humanity as connected to the larger community of life; places that forever provide solitude and respite from modern civilization, its technologies, conventions, and contrivances.

"Wilderness solitude is a state of mind, a mental freedom that emerges from settings where visitors experience nature essentially free of the reminders of society, its inventions, and conventions. Privacy and isolation are important components, but solitude also is enhanced by the absence of other distractions, such as large groups, mechanization, unnatural noise, signs, and other modern artifacts… it is conducive to the psychological benefits associated with wilderness and one's free and independent response to nature."

—Roger Kaye, Wilderness Scholar, 2001

Public Use

"The purpose of the Wilderness Act is to preserve the wilderness character of the areas to be included in the wilderness system, not to establish any particular use."

—Howard Zahniser, Chief Author of The Wilderness Act, 1962

The Wilderness Act identifies a number of allowable "public purposes" for wilderness. These are recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use. It is important to keep in mind that these "public purposes" are **not** the statutory purpose of the Act. They are the appropriate purposes for which the public may use wilderness. While these "public purposes" are allowable uses of wilderness, they are not mandatory uses. The "public purposes" or uses do not take precedence over the Act's singular statutory purpose to preserve an enduring resource of wilderness by preserving the wilderness character of each area in the NWPS.

Except as otherwise provided in this Act, each agency administering any area designated as wilderness shall be responsible for preserving the wilderness character of the area and shall so administer such area for such other purposes for which it may have been established *as also to preserve its wilderness character.*

—The Wilderness Act, § 4(b)

If any of the allowable public uses of wilderness conflict with the preservation of an area's wilderness character, then, by law, protecting wilderness character has priority. A wilderness can be completely closed to one or all of these "public purposes" if such use would diminish or degrade any components of wilderness character. For this reason, there are several wildernesses that are completely closed year-round to any public entry, as well as some that are completely closed to the public for part of each year.

Conclusion

"This is the challenge of wilderness management, preserving what is unseen and unmeasurable . . ."

—Roger Kaye, Wilderness Scholar, 2001

The concept and *idea* of "wilderness" is premised upon humans approaching and interacting with certain landscapes in a manner that is different from how we approach any other area of land. Keeping alive the idea of wilderness requires our participation in a special relationship with these landscapes that is very different from the utilitarian, commodity-oriented manner in which modern society generally interacts with nature. Preserving the idea of wilderness requires that humans exercise humility and restraint, not dominance and control over the land and its natural processes. The opportunity to experience this kind of relationship with nature is an increasingly endangered experience in our modern world. Designated wilderness is the only landscape where this form of interaction between humans and nature is required by law.

The unique values of wilderness will continue to be available to us and to future generations only as long as we continue to treat wilderness as special places set apart from the conveniences and routines of modern daily life. Preserving the meaning of wilderness depends on the attitudes and actions of everyone, visitors and managers alike, as well as those who may never visit but find their spirits nurtured just in knowing authentic wilderness still exists.

3. WILDERNESS: MYTH AND REALITY
By the West Virginia Wilderness Coalition *(www.wvwild.org)*

Myth: Hunting and fishing are not allowed in wilderness.
Reality: Hunting and fishing are two of the primary intended uses of wilderness in the national forests. Some of the best hunting and fishing in the U.S. is in our wilderness areas.

Myth: Wilderness designation involves acquisition of additional land by the federal government.
Reality: Wilderness designation occurs on land already owned by the public through the federal government. No additional land purchases are required.

Myth: Wilderness conflicts with "multiple use" of public lands.
Reality: Wilderness is "multiple use," by fact and law. The five multiple uses of national forests are wildlife, watershed, recreation, range, and timber. All five occur in wilderness; however, the timber remains standing!

Myth: Wilderness "locks up" commercial forest land.
Reality: The national forests produce less than five percent of the U.S. timber supply. Timber in potential wilderness is generally less accessible than privately owned timber. Wilderness "frees up" land from being developed.

Myth: Wilderness harms local economies.
Reality: Wilderness provides numerous economic benefits and helps maintain the natural capital that can help communities diversify economies by attracting and retaining new businesses, residents, and a local workforce. Wilderness can also protect scenic backdrops that improve property values, thereby increasing county revenues.

Myth: Wilderness restricts recreational opportunities, making it available only to the young, healthy, and wealthy
Reality: One of the most important purposes of national forest wilderness is to provide people with a broad array of outdoor recreational opportunities. These include hunting, fishing, backpacking, camping, horseback riding, mountaineering, rock climbing, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, wildlife viewing, photography, canoeing, and kayaking.

Myth: Only pure, pristine, and virgin lands qualify for wilderness designation.
Reality: The 1964 Wilderness Act carefully defines wilderness as "an area of undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence and which generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable." The Eastern Wilderness Act of 1975 made allowances for a certain degree of impact in wilderness lands east of the Mississippi. It recognized the need for wilderness in the very populous eastern half of the country despite the relative lack of "untouched" lands there.

Myth: Wilderness erodes private property rights.
Reality: Only federal land may be designated wilderness. Private property inside designated wilderness areas can be acquired only if the owner agrees to sell, unless the acquisition is specifically authorized by Congress. Private land may be surrounded by wilderness, but wilderness area management restrictions do not apply to the private land. Property owners must be assured "adequate access" to their parcels, and that could include permission to drive through a wilderness.

Myth: Motorized transportation is totally prohibited in wilderness areas, even in emergencies.
Reality: While the Wilderness Act prohibits the general use of motorized equipment or vehicles in wilderness, the law clearly allows for their use by managing agencies for search and rescue, firefighting, and other circumstances where they are found to be the minimum tool necessary for the administration of an area. For example, helicopters may be used to evacuate an injured person, and chainsaws might be allowed to clear massive blow downs across trails.

Myth: Fires, insects, and diseases may not be controlled in wilderness areas.
Reality: Section 4(d)(1) of the Act states that "such measures may be taken as necessary in the control of fires, insects, and diseases.

4. A MANDATE TO PROTECT AMERICA'S WILDERNESS
By Douglas W. Scott, Policy Director, Campaign for America's Wilderness, January, 2003

Executive Summary
Surveys of public opinion taken over the past four years by commercial polling firms and the media— and by the federal government itself—consistently find that the American people treasure the heritage of wilderness on their public lands.

The American people want to see more of their federal lands preserved as wilderness—consistently and by wide margins.

The very high level of support for protecting more wilderness is broadly shared:

- Geographically, registering in nationwide, state and local polls
- Among both urban and rural residents
- Across the political spectrum
- Among all ages and ethnicities

Strongly held values drive this majority support for protecting more wilderness. These values go far beyond on-site recreational use of wilderness areas, reflecting:

- A strong and fundamental sense of duty to preserve a legacy of wildness for future generations
- Very high appreciation for the "ecological services" of wilderness—clean water, clean air, habitat for wildlife
- A commitment to protecting wild scenic landscapes to enjoy from the roadside as well as the trail

Americans believe decisions about the fate of their federal lands that could be—but are not yet—protected as wilderness should be made in the national interest.

This report is based on a comprehensive review of public opinion polls concerning wilderness taken in 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002. In this first review of its kind, we sought to include all credible polling touching on wilderness. The support for preserving wilderness—and more of it—is highly consistent through them all. The findings of polls by commercial firms and the media are confirmed by academic surveys and, most notably, in intensive polling done by the U.S. government.

More than ever before, in the words of President Lyndon Johnson, there is "informed public opinion demanding that we maintain our wilderness birthright."

To download the full report, go to www.leaveitwild.org/reports/polling_report_exec_summary.html (52 Pages PDF 1.81 MB).

5. LETTER TO SMYTH COUNTY, VIRGINIA, BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
By Joel Cathey, Director, Virginia Forestry Association Board and Executive Committee

April 2, 2003

The Virginia Forestry Association is writing to express opposition to a resolution that we understand is being considered by the Board of Supervisors of Smyth County calling for the creation of additional wilderness areas In your County, We have been informed that an employee of a preservationist special interest group is approaching Boards of Supervisors of several counties in your area, lobbying for expanded wilderness lock-up of federal forestland. We respectfully ask the Board to consider the following points:

An active forest management program can best maintain the long-term health of the forest. Our national forests are already suffering from lack of management. Additional wilderness designation would make good science-based management nearly impossible. If no harvesting or other disturbance is allowed, these forests will deteriorate resulting in fire, insects, and disease problems, which can spread to adjoining private land.

Recreational opportunities are decreased in a wilderness area. Lack of access and strict use limitations severely limit use by the majority of the public, particularly families with young children, the elderly and the handicapped. The popular sport of mountain biking is excluded. Horse trails deteriorate and cannot be properly maintained without mechanized equipment.

Surrounding areas do not benefit from increased tourism. Hunters and hikers bring little new money to the area. Bland County, for example, has not benefited from the Kimberling Creek Wilderness area.

Non-management negatively impacts diverse wildlife populations. A diversity of habitats is healthy for most wildlife species. There is already talk of seeking threatened species designation for the golden-winged warbler because of lack of vegetative management. Grouse and deer habitat are disappearing.

Non-management threatens the area being designated. If fire or insect and disease infestations break out little would be done to save the area because of the wilderness designation.

Special interest groups are trying county by county to persuade Boards of Supervisors to pass resolutions for additional wilderness with as limited public input as possible. The Virginia Forestry Association believes that there is already enough land in the Jefferson National Forest designated as wilderness and that the goals and desires of all citizens can best be met by a vibrant and active multiple-use, forest management program.

Unlike some of these other so-called environmental groups, the Virginia Forestry Association promotes stewardship and wise use of the Commonwealth's forest resources for the economic and environmental benefit of all Virginians. For this reason, we respectfully ask you to vote against any county resolution calling for additions to the national wilderness preserve system. Instead, please consider passing a resolution calling for true multiple-use, practical, science-based management of all National Forest lands.

Sincerely,
Joel Cathey, Director
VFA Board and Executive Committee

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Paul R. Howe, Executive Vice President

This correspondence is included with the permission of author Joel Cathey and the Virginia Forestry Association (January 23, 2004).

6. WHAT DOES DIVERSITY HAVE TO DO WITH WILDERNESS
By Sharon Parker, Governing Council Member, The Wilderness Society

Atlanta resident Sharon Parker challenges us to reframe and expand our concept of wilderness to encompass people and communities of color.

Wilderness is an important concept. It represents a core American value. It connotes ruggedness and fierce individuality; icons of early American identity. Wilderness also signifies challenge: The challenge of humans existing in the harshness of our natural environment. It touches and shapes our sense of beauty and inspires awesome reverence for its being. And it can evoke a spiritual ecstasy that I experience as true "freedom."

The 35 year old Wilderness Act embodies America's commitment to preserve and protect its natural heritage. Despite its importance to American values and heritage, only about two percent of the land base in the lower 48 states has been preserved for future generations. This is partly because we think that our natural resources will always be there for us: The Grand Canyon, Glacier Park, the Everglades, the Smoky Mountains. We believe that the water, air, forests, swamps, glacial lakes, etc. inside our national parks and wilderness areas will always be preserved as pristine as when first encountered. We have reinforced this mindset because to preserve wilderness, we have set aside wilderness areas. Thus, it would seem that wilderness has been removed from our daily lives and its care has been left too often to a cadre of specialists: Foresters, biologists, geologists, surveyors, and policy analysts.

But wilderness is not removed from our everyday lives. From the Caribbean to China, from the Arctic to Cape Horn, wilderness is an essential part of our lives. When we log forests or drain wetlands for commercial gain, we are often unaware of the ecosystems that are forever destroyed and the food and medicinal resources that we will never know. This loss begins a process of long-term pollution of water, air, soil, and plant and animal life that threatens human communities through disease, starvation, and tremendous economic hardship.

When we lose wilderness through deforestation, we experience floods, droughts, loss of agriculture. The resulting devastation costs homes, lives, and communities. A report of 1998 weather-related disasters from the WorldWatch Institute notes that 32,000 people died and another *300 million people worldwide* were displaced as a result of disasters such as Hurricane Mitchell, the flooding of the Yangtze River, drought in Africa, fires in Indonesia.

These are all very great reasons for supporting the preservation of wilderness in the U.S., in the Americas, and throughout the world. However, in the next century this work must include not only the preservation of wilderness, but also *a new consciousness* of the importance of wilderness in everyday lives. We must change our way of thinking about wilderness from a concept of a remote or faraway place, to the idea of natural places that encompass the everyday lives of diverse peoples and communities.

There is another very important reason to build a new consciousness of wilderness. The majesty of wilderness inspires awe and re-connects us to our Higher Power. Inspired by this connection, we appreciate the value and scope of life, and experience a powerful sense of freedom.

Wilderness is both a metaphor for freedom and a physical place to be in touch with the spiritual nature of true freedom. Too many people have experienced only the de-valuation of their lives and the absence of freedom: families persecuted and massacred in Bosnia Herzegovina, Palestine, Haiti, Iraq, or El Salvador; children in U.S. drug zones or violent schools; men of color imprisoned in disproportionately high numbers; African Americans denied housing, job, promotion opportunities or simple respect; Native peoples denied self-determination and economic opportunity; or White Americans trapped by their narrow thinking and stereotyping of other peoples and cultures.

If the new consciousness of wilderness is to have meaning, we must honor the connection between the life force and spiritual nature of wilderness with the life force and spiritual nature of people and communities worldwide. <www.wilderness.org/AboutUs/diversity/parker.cfm> (January 21, 2004)

7. HEALING THE LAND
By Jaime A. Pinkham, (Nez Perce Tribe), Governing Council Member, The Wilderness Society

In 1877, in the debates preceding our war with the U.S., a Nez Perce leader said, "*The Earth is part of my body. I belong to the land out of which I came. The Earth is my mother.*" These words reflect a sacred allegiance between our people and the land. And the man who spoke them was not simply expressing an opinion, but rather describing a way of life.

Long ago, Indian people respectfully took what the land had to present-nature offered physical and spiritual sustenance, and our activities reflected an understanding of the natural cycles turning upon the land and waters. Nature provided what was sacred and necessary for us to freely express our religious convictions. We could not sever ourselves from the land. Just as all things in the ecosystem are intimately connected and cannot survive isolated from one another, we, too, were a vulnerable and resilient part of the ecosystem. When the salmon returned to the healing waters of their birth, we followed. When the roots and berries returned to the mountains, so did we. Nature sustained us and assured our survival. We put our faith into the hands of the earth, our Mother. Nature, in other words, managed us.

Today, nature remains our provider, but we have now become managers. It is our turn to care for and heal the land. To be worthy of this task, we must concede to nature's wisdom. Nature has always had a voice and rhythm of her own. Some people cover their ears and refuse to hear her, while others are overcome by the rattle of politics which drowns the voice. Fortunately, there are those who hear what the land has to say. And, there are those who believe what we hear.

The west was once thought to be "empty", unused wilderness with plenty of room for expansion. It was also considered a "full" world, abundant with nature's bounties. Over the past 150 years, people lost sight of living within natural limits, assuming that nature was endlessly forgiving. Today's world is full as the human population grows and we approach the limits of its tolerance for our noxious consequences. Biologically, it is becoming an empty world, as we watch resources wither into extinction.

Safeguarding wilderness is important because the best science and technology available is not always fail safe. Today, we are students of some hard-learned lessons. There is still so much to be learned about the care of the land. With the loss of each piece of the landscape we are deprived of its lessons and spirit.

The political landscape regarding the care and management of land in this country is difficult to navigate and, more often than not, pits neighbor against neighbor. To effectively resolve the conflicts we face, we must acknowledge areas where we agree. We must also respect our differences. As we battle to resolve tough issues, we must strive to find peaceful solutions that meet the needs of all involved. After all, when the debate winds down, regardless of the outcome, we will still be neighbors. And, we pray, for the sake of our children, that the product of the debates will unite, not sever the bonds of our communities.

Slowly, we are trying to reconcile the differences that fragment us. We are many heritages with but only one Mother Earth-the one earth upon which we prove ourselves to our Creator. We must put our faith in the values that underpin our diversity, not always in legal entanglements or political mischief. Faith should be placed in the character of leaders who can work together to sort out the discords to find harmony.

Soon this nation will commemorate the bicentennial of its pioneering spirit-Lewis and Clark's Corp of Discovery. Pioneers cannot leave mistakes behind. We cannot allow the civilization of the land and waters to outstrip our will to restore and protect the land that bears the burden of our errors. Haunting, difficult land management questions remain as we seek to protect the people who live here and all nature's creatures whose struggles to survive reflect our own.

Healing the land goes hand in hand with caring for one another. And, no doubt we will continue to walk a tightrope as we try to balance the need to care for our environment and our communities. We will continue to search for new science, new technology and new leadership to help us care for and heal the resources we all depend on. But, science, technology, and leadership come and go, changing like the seasons. The everlasting promise, however, lies in our spirit to overcome the challenges that arise time and again-the spirit that will allow us to find a peaceful place next to one another.

<www.wilderness.org/AboutUs/diversity/jaime_nezperce.cfm> (January 21, 2004)